

Meeting God

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Preacher: Wayne Schuller

[0 : 0 0] God's word together. Let's pray. Lord God, please sanctify us by the truth. Your word is the truth. Please show yourself to us in the Bible. Please help us to respond with faith and appropriate trembling and fear before your great name, Lord. And help us and accept us as we reflect on your word through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well, one guaranteed way to embarrass me in front of another minister is when a minister asks me the question, Wayne, what is your church's mission statement? I know we've got one.

It's on the AGM, the Annual General Meeting Reports. It's there somewhere, I think. And I think I could tell you the gist of it or the substance of it, but I couldn't tell you the catchphrase exact text of it. And that's mainly because in my experience, before I was a minister just working in the IT industry, various companies and unis, was that the whole mission statement thing is a bit of a veil and a bit of a joke. Most of the time it's been implemented. I'm sure that's not true here, and I'm sure most churches that do it do it wholeheartedly, but my experience is that anything where there's sort of that jargony kind of language of advanced strategic planning, mission statements, strategic alignment, strategic values, anything to do with the word strategic, in my experience, hasn't been strategic. And one Melbourne Uni department I worked in, they spent a lot of money printing glossy brochures and posters, their sort of vision for that department. But everyone knew that the department was the opposite of what they espoused and that it was a backstabbing, full of lies, political kind of workplace. And the glossy mission statements were just a reminder of the hypocrisy that filled the air of that workplace. In one church I was in, I may have told this story before, but it was so fun, they thought this church was a great church. They thought all these other churches have mission statements, we should get one, how will we get one, let's make it a competition for the kids. Okay kids, you can win a CD player, a portable CD player, if you come up with a great mission statement for our church. And from the mouth of babes, one was found. The worst church mission statement I ever saw was in big texts all over this church's website in America. And it was a horrible vision or mission statement from the Bible. It was, all these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me, which is from the temptation narrative, the words of Satan to worship Satan. I've been to many church leadership seminars where I was promised a lot. I was promised that if I went, I'd be told how to transform my church to take Jesus Christ to impact the world. I mean, when I got to the seminar, I paid a lot of money and gave a whole day or two. Jesus Christ wasn't mentioned and all that was mentioned was kind of fluff about mission statements and those kind of things. So please forgive me, friends, for being a cynic when it comes to this area. I do actually think we need to know our mission. We do need to know our purpose. I would love to take the time to give out 150 pieces of paper today and to ask you to write down what you think the purpose of Holy Trinity Doncaster is. I suspect I might get 150 different answers. And then that just reveals the problem, doesn't it? We need to know what our mission is. And we can't just say our mission is to give everyone what they want from this church because that would be impossible for any man. And I think it would be impossible for God because some people may have mutually exclusive goals for our church. I'm happy to say today I bring to you from God's word what our mission statement is. That in today's text, when Israel have come out of

Egypt to the mountain of God, God gives them both a mission statement and a vision and a vision of who he is, a vision of his holiness. And I think that both the mission and the vision apply to the people of God throughout salvation history. And it continues into the New Testament for us today, the church.

So let's find out what our mission is. Catching up to chapter 19, they've made it to Sinai on the third new moon after the Israelites have gone out of the land of Egypt. On that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. The timing matters because God has providentially had his hand on this people and has done exactly what he said he would do. They journeyed from Rephidim into the wilderness of Sinai, camped in the wilderness, and Israel camped in front of the mountain.

[5 : 01] Everything in this chapter revolves around this mountain of God where Moses first sort of met God at the burning bush looking for lost sheep. Now he's brought the whole people of God to this mountain.

And there's so much in this chapter about how close can they get up the mountain to God. When they arrive, it's fascinating, Moses and God both cross paths, it seems, in verse 3.

Moses immediately goes, went up to God. And as he's doing that, the Lord called to him from the mountain. So God calls to him as he's coming up saying, thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, tell the Israelites. And here comes the mission statement that this is their constitution as a nation, as it were. You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. God has done all the work required to get Israel to this point.

He has fought for them. They just had to keep still. He has parted waters for them. They just had to walk through. He has fed them day by day, give them water from all these things from miraculous sources. He has borne them on eagles' wings. Now therefore, verse 5, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words you shall speak to the Israelites. And so there in 5 and 6, we have one of the greatest texts of the old covenant, really the whole Bible, that God's mission statement of the purpose of his people, both for himself and for the world. God is making with them a covenant. He's making a relationship with them, which has conditions and attendant promises. God has saved them by grace. This is not by works.

This has all been by grace. Now that they are rescued, they have a covenant to keep with God and more promises to claim from God. And the great hope is that they will be God's treasured possession.

[7 : 17] They will be God's treasured possession. In effect, if the whole earth is his collection of jewels and the work of his hands, Israel are to be the crown jewels of all creation. They are to be his masterpiece. They are to be a one-of-a-kind group that is God's treasured possession among the whole nations. And this immediately creates a problem because we've seen what these people are like. They're not very good at all, really. They grumble.

They complain. They harden their hearts. They rebel as quickly as they can. So how can these people be God's treasured possession? I think the answer is God will treasure them because of what they will do, what their mission will be. And this is their mission. They are to be, verse 6, a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. They will be for God, a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.

He will treasure them because of what they will do for his name in the world. Both the images of priestly kingdom and holy nation, they are both evangelistic or outreach type images.

They are both missionary images of the role of God's people in God's world. They are royalty. Israel is royalty, but a royalty of priests. And a priest is an intercessor.

A priest is a mediator. A priest is someone who communicates and brings God to people who don't know God. Even though Israel has a priesthood within its ranks, the whole nation is to be priestly.

[9 : 03] All the people of God are to communicate God to his world. Similar image with the holy nation. The whole earth is mine, God says, but you'll be a holy nation.

That is, they will be set apart by God, for God. And they are to embody holiness by obeying the law which is given at this event.

And in being holy and being set apart for God and being dedicated to God, they will show the world God. They will show the world what it is to know God. And other people will be able to join them and join this holy nation.

Friends, it's really important that we don't forget and don't lose this missionary outlook of the people of God. It's so quickly forgotten. Israel quickly forgot it and became inward and proud about who they were.

But actually, they are there to serve the world. They are there to make God known to the world, to be a kingdom of priests. Their holiness, their set-apartness for God, their obedience of the Ten Commandments, are all there to serve the purpose of making God known to the world.

[10 : 14] And so, if we apply this to the people of God today, and we know from chapters like Peter's first letter, chapter 2, where he just copies these images and applies them to the new covenant people of God, if we think about this role for us today, we are existing to make God known to the world.

We have an evangelistic outlook. We do not think that God's commands to us are just for our private spirituality, our private morality, and it's our business with God.

We are to be holy and obedient and faithful to God, so the world will see and the world will know God, and that we would speak to them about our Lord Jesus Christ. We are to be evangelistic, missionary.

Or the new word for it, the new kind of old word for it is missional, which just means, I think, being oriented to reach the world, to be oriented to mission, is to be missional.

We are to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. We are to be God's treasure, God's treasure possession in the world, and he will treasure us because we will glorify him in the world as we make him known in the world.

[11 : 26] The well-known quote, this captures it well, the church is the only institution which exists for those who are outside its membership. The only institution which exists for those who are outside its membership.

You know, whenever the church becomes inward-looking, that's when it dies. Whenever the church becomes merely kind of a social justice kind of organisation without any evangelism, then it dies.

But our lifeblood is to reach the world for Christ. That's our lifeblood. Now, you may personally feel or be confused about where do you fit into this force that we are part of.

You may not feel like you have the gift of being an evangelist. You may find it incredibly difficult and trying to share the gospel or to speak about Jesus with unbelievers, with people in your family or at work.

I think part of the answer is that we do this as a body and there are different gifts and there are some of us who are really good at that. I don't think I'm one of them, but some of us are.

[12 : 32] They've got that spiritual gift. Others of us have other gifts. But together, we ought to be working to be a welcoming church, a reaching out church, an inviting church, a befriending church, a church that teaches people about Jesus, not just on Sundays but with other groups, all our small groups ought to have an outlooking kind of hope that even just in social events, our small group might be able to invite people in and communicate Christ somehow.

At the very least, in terms of our prayers, ought to be marked by intercession for the lost, that nations might know Jesus Christ and that we would be spreaders of it.

I don't like it when churches emphasize numbers, but we ought to be concerned for growth. We ought to be concerned and have high expectations if we are a bigger-sized church that we should expect bigger evangelism.

We ought not to benchmark ourselves against the evangelism of a smaller church, but much more is expected of a church like us. Friends, if you're...

So we are a body. We do this as a body. I think another part of the answer is if you're uncomfortable evangelizing people, I think maybe that's what Jesus had in mind when he said, if you would follow me, you take up your cross and do it.

[13 : 54] You know, you actually... To follow Jesus is to do embarrassing things for him or to do shameful things for him. And it can be... It can hurt to try and talk about Jesus with people who don't believe in him.

That's part of who we are and taking up our cross and following Christ. The last thing I would say about being missional as a church, if it's who we are, if it's our God-given mission, is that we ought to find better ways to equip each other to do evangelism.

And I do feel a bit bad in one sense by saying, well, you should evangelize more, but we actually need to help each other in doing that. And there are great resources around to do that.

And we ought to think better, more as a church, about how can we train each other in sharing the gospel and support each other in doing it because it's so hard. Well, how will God's people respond to the mission statement?

Well, we have it in 7 and 8. Moses came and he communicates the mission to the elders of the people and sets before them the words of the Lord. And the people all answered as one.

[15 : 01] Everything the Lord has spoken, we will do. I'm not sure that's the best practice business-wise. When you have mission statements, you're supposed to sort of somehow get people to own them.

And I think the idea is you come up with the mission and try and get the people to think it was their idea and then they own it. Well, God just says, here is your mission. But the people say with faith, everything the Lord has spoken, we will do.

So they accept the mission with faith. This is who we want to be because God has spoken it. That's the mission. A kingdom of priests, a treasured possession.

Very interestingly, through this whole chapter, we see Moses really coming into his own for what he was called to do. If you asked anyone, what's Moses most famous for?

What would you say? You'd probably say Moses is the guy who brought people out of Egypt. But here in chapter 19, we actually see Moses doing what he was really meant to do, which was actually be a prophet, to be the mediator of God's words, that God's words come down and then he takes the people's words back.

[16 : 07] Moses is the prophet par excellence. And God himself says in verse 9, Part of this event is establishing Moses as prophet of God's words, of God's revelation.

And what Moses is for Israel, Israel will be for the whole world. They will bring God's words and God's revelation and God to the world. So that's the mission, to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Now what's the vision? The vision is a vision of God. And so far we've seen that God's people aren't very holy and they're going to now learn how holy their God is. So verse 9 and 10, So God is going to visibly make his special presence known, make his holiness and greatness known to Israel on this mountain.

But Israel aren't holy and so God tells them, verse 12, You shall set limits for the people all around, saying, Be careful not to go up the mountain or to touch the edge of it.

God is so holy that they have to be careful how close they get to him because they are not holy. And there's a danger again and again that God will break out in judgment.

[17 : 49] And so they need to approach God very, very carefully. And if anyone does touch the mountain, they are to be put to death and put to death without touching them. No hand shall touch them, verse 13, but they shall be stoned or shot with arrows, whether animal or human being, they shall not live.

When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain. So they are to keep their distance. And then when the trumpet sounds, we don't really know who's blowing this trumpet. It could be Moses or Aaron.

It could be God. It could be an angel. When the trumpet sounds, they can go up the mountain, that is, up to the barriers, sort of at the base of the mountain. Then they can touch the very edge of the mountain.

And so Moses goes down, verse 14, And he consecrated the people and washed their clothes. He said to the people, Prepare for the third day. Do not go near a woman. That is, do not have sexual relations, not because they're sinful, but because you want to spend three days focusing on God, focusing on getting ready to meet God, to meet the God who's rescued you.

And so what will happen when God comes? How will they meet God? It's sort of exciting, isn't it? You know, finally, the people who haven't known God, even though he's rescued them, they're going to meet the one who rescued them.

[19 : 09] What will he be like? How will it be? Let's find out in verse 16. You already have a sense, don't you, that this is not going to be joyful in the flippant sense of this isn't going to sort of just be a kind of happy light moment.

This is a heavy moment. This is a trembling moment. Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain.

Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently.

In effect, that's scary. That is, that, you would be shaking in your pants. What is going on that this mountain shakes? And it's been enveloped in smoke and lightning and fire.

The language here is trying to describe something in effect indescribable. That is a theophany, an appearance of God to his people on the mountain. And in a sense that it's a veiled presentation of God, but it's still enough to make them quake, to make them shake.

[20 : 36] As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak, and God would answer him in thunder. When the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai to the top of the mountain, the Lord summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

After all of this preparation and presentation, it's quite, there's a big contrast between the people and Moses, that the people trembling come forward to the barrier, and Moses is the only one, and Aaron in a minute, who actually steps over the barrier and goes up to sort of see God and to talk with God.

And what will the first words be that God will give the people at this meeting? What will the first words be? Verse 21, The Lord said to Moses, Go down and warn the people not to break through to the Lord to look.

Otherwise, many of them will perish. Even the priests who approach the Lord must consecrate themselves, or the Lord will break out against them. God's first words to his people at Sinai are, Stay away.

Keep your distance. Lest in God's holiness he destroy the unholy. Lest that he break out against them. And Moses responds by saying, It's okay, that won't happen because they've already heard your word.

[22 : 04] Moses said to the Lord, The people are not permitted to come up to this mountain because you yourself warned us saying, Quote, Set limits around the mountain and keep it holy. And the Lord said to him, Go down and come up bringing Aaron with you.

So only those two. But do not let either the priests or the people break through to come up to the Lord. Otherwise, he will break out against them. It's a very unusual meeting.

They are being brought to the mountain to meet God and yet they're not allowed to go up because they are not holy and God is and God will destroy the unholy. So the question I've been thinking about is, In what sense do they really meet God?

They get a sense of his greatness and in trembling from a distance they see on this mountain, he's God and we cannot go close. They do get a sense of their own unholiness and sinfulness in the distance.

But how do they actually meet God? How do they actually connect with God at Sinai? The answer I think is the same way we meet God.

[23 : 13] They meet God at Sinai through his word, through the word of his prophet. They meet God through a mediator who brings God's word and words to them, words of revelation.

I don't know how many times Moses goes up and down, up and down, up and down, but really they meet God through the word Moses brings to them. In fact, God himself, as we've seen in verse 9, says the whole point of this event in one aspect is to show the role of Moses.

In verse 9, I'm going to come to you in a cloud so that people may hear when I speak with you, Moses, and trust you, Moses, ever after. That is, this event will show them that you are a prophet and that you are the one who carries my words and they will meet with me through the words you will bring with them, bring to them.

In fact, in Exodus chapter 20, God gives the law and God gives words. And the very first words of chapter 20 of the Ten Commandments are, then God spoke all these words.

And so Moses will bring this message to the people. That's how they will meet God in his word. They meet God in the word that says of their mission to be a treasured possession, a priestly kingdom, a holy nation.

[24 : 29] They meet God when they hear his words for their mission. And if you remember, friends, back in chapter 2, remember there was that really kind of enigmatic sign and Moses was scared about the Exodus and he wanted a sign and God said, here's a sign.

When you have, chapter 2, verse 12, this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.

How is that a sign? It's a sign of God can keep his word. It's a sign that God is God and his word can be trusted because now they are here that the prophetic promise has been fulfilled.

And so the sign is actually more about the trustworthiness of God's word. God is known through his word. God reveals his word at Sinai and he is met in his word.

The people connect with God through receiving his words by Moses. And friends, that's exactly how we meet God today. That's exactly how we experience God today.

[25 : 36] We meet God in his word. We know God through his word. The living God speaks through his living words to us today. I think we all know this because of the way that we avoid the Bible.

I often have met Christians who feel like everyone else enjoys the Bible except them. But actually, none of us, in a sense, enjoy the Bible in that when we come to the Bible, we come to God and we sense our unholiness and God's holiness.

So we avoid reading the Bible because it kind of makes us feel guilty or it makes us sense how undeserving we are. I think in every dusty, unread Bible, there's a Christian who's avoiding God, who's actually set themselves too far from God.

It's similar when you have Christians who only read the bits of the Bible they like. So they don't read the bits of the Bible that talk, say, about God's holiness or God's judgment. They're showing that they know they meet God in his word and they're avoiding the bits about God that they don't like.

God is met in his word. I think we ought to read the Bible the same way we pray and we only pray by praying in Jesus' name. It's a way of saying by the blood of Christ, please forgive us and accept our prayers through Jesus.

[27 : 00] I think we need to read the Bible in the same way, in Jesus' name. Such that we can only really hear God's words and meet with him if we've been cleansed by the blood of Christ, if we've been sanctified by the blood of Christ.

Then we need not be running from God and we can know the holy God and meet with the powerful God that we ought to reverence and fear. Well, friends, in conclusion, let's come back to this mission.

we are to be a royal priesthood and a holy nation. Nothing turns people off more from Christianity than hypocrisy and so we are to, in obeying God's word and trusting God's word, we are to be a holy people.

We have to have integrity in our witness and to reflect something of the holiness of God. God. Our mission is to mediate God to the world and the vision is God is holy.

God is hard to approach. If you put those two together, you actually have a problem, don't you? Because how do you make God known to the world if God is liable to break out against the world and God is holy and the world is not?

[28 : 19] That's actually quite a hard mission. I think the answer is two parts. One part, you bring God to the world by bringing his word to the world and that word contains the word of the gospel which contains God's own gift of atonement through his son.

In fact, the law itself that Moses gives contains a shadow of that in the sacrificial system that God's word reveals to us the means of actually making God propitious to us and favourable to us and unholy people.

But we ought to be thinking about how can we bring God's word to the world? How can we be bringing the Bible to people? How can we be getting people to read the Bible with us and hear God's word?

If you're here today, by the way, and you're not sure whether you're a Christian or you know that you're not a Christian believer, you're just checking this out, then you ought to learn from Exodus 19 that God is not easily approached, that none of us have a right to heaven, none of us can even ever earn our way to heaven, but we are unholy and God is holy and he will destroy us, he will destroy you unless you find forgiveness through the blood of his son.

So if that is you, if you're not sure about that, come to Jesus Christ today and come to his word and read his word asking God to help you believe it and trust it. And I think Exodus 19 is a good reminder for us Christians that God is not easily approached, that God is hard to approach, that it was costly for Jesus to open the way to God through the cross and that I think the day of judgment will be worse than Sinai such that it will not be an easy day for the believer, it will be a hard day, it will be a day we will not cruise through it but it will really drive us to our knees and claim the name of Jesus on that day.

[30 : 16] I think fearing God is good for us if it humbles us and drives us to Jesus Christ and to his grace. And so friends, I challenge you, may our purpose be to bring God to the world and may our experience of God be of dependent, trembling, treasuring of the words of God.

I'll pray for us. Dear God, our Heavenly Father, we thank you that we have met with you through our Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that we have met with you through the indwelling of your spirit and we thank you that we have met with you in hearing your word through the Bible to us.

Lord God, we look forward but with trepidation, with trembling to meeting with you on that great day where we'll see you face to face, where we'll be as close with you closer with you than anyone has ever been except Jesus, that on that day we will see you and we will hear your voice and we will fall down in worship.

Father, everything you have spoken, we will do through Jesus Christ. Amen.